

A NEWLY RECOGNIZED VARIETY OF CHILI-PEPPER (*CAPSICUM*:  
SOLANACEAE) DEVELOPED IN THE UNITED STATES

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ABSTRACT

A previously undescribed cultivated variety of chili-pepper (*Capsicum chinense* Jacq.) is recognized as "Datil." It is the only variety of *C. chinense* commercially cultivated in the United States. Datil is most similar in fruit morphology to the Habanero pepper (also *C. chinense*), from which it perhaps was derived. It has been cultivated for at least 100 years in Florida, where its characteristics apparently have been selected.

KEY WORDS: *Capsicum*, Solanaceae, cultivar

In my continued sampling and exploration of the variation among domesticated peppers (Andrews 1984), a distinctive variety of *Capsicum chinense* Jacq., has come to my attention. It apparently is restricted to Florida, where it has been cultivated for probably more than a century, and I can find no mention in the literature of this pepper. It is formally provided here with a name, adopted from the name informally applied to it by the local growers.

***Capsicum chinense* Jacq. [cultivar] "DATIL" J. Andrews** TYPE: UNITED STATES. Florida: St. John Co., St. Augustine, 25 Jul 1990, *J. Andrews s.n.* (HOLOTYPE: TEX; Isotype: TEX).

Annual, glabrous herbs from a taproot. Leaves ovate with attenuate apices, the blades mostly 5-10 cm long, 3.0-5.5 cm wide, on petioles 1-3 cm long. Flowers axillary, 2 or more per node, on pedicels 18-25 mm long at maturity; corollas greenish white to creamy; anthers purple. Fruits shallowly wrinkled,

ovate-elliptic, distinctly narrowed apically to a slight neck, distally acute, 2.5-6.0 cm long, 1.0-1.5 cm wide at the widest point, initially nearly white, becoming purplish if in full sun, then to lime green, then golden yellow at full maturity.

The fruits of Datil are most similar in morphology to those of the variety known as "Habanero," which, to my knowledge, is commercially cultivated only in the West Indies and Yucatán, México. Compared to Datil, the Habanero fruits are shorter (3-4 cm long), differently shaped (widely ovate, apically truncate and completely without a neck), and differently colored (distinctly orange to reddish at maturity). Three other varieties of *Capsicum chinense* are grown in the area of St. Augustine, but none is commercially utilized. All of the varieties are said to have originated in the West Indies. Apart from Datil and the Tabasco pepper, which is *C. frutescens* L., all other peppers commercially cultivated in the United States are *C. annum* L. var. *annuum*.

Local legend, without factual basis, attributes the origin of the Datil peppers to the Minorcans, who were brought by the British to Florida in 1768 as indentured workers for indigo plantations. It seems nearly certain, however, that Datil originated from seed of Habanero-like plants introduced from Cuba, which was a major center of trade with Florida during its early history. According to his son, Mr. James Odum of St. Augustine, who died more than 10 years ago, grew the peppers for 73 years. Therefore, this variety is known to have been in constant cultivation for at least nearly a century and perhaps twice that long if the name originated soon after the arrival of the Minorcans, since "Datil"="date" in Minorcan Spanish. The fruit has the wrinkled shape, and in some cases the color, of a dried date, a food familiar to Mediterranean people such as the Minorcans.

The Datil peppers are restricted in their cultivation to the area around St. Augustine, Florida. About a dozen farmers grow and sell the peppers, which are grown in small plots of about 100-350 plants and picked from June until frost. All of the fruits are utilized by local food and sauce producers.

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LITERATURE CITED

Andrews, J. 1984. *The Pepper Book*. University of Texas Press, Austin.